

# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## STATE HOME NOMINATED FOR COMMUNITY AWARDS

The Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home has been nominated for two community awards by members of the Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce. Winners will be announced at the Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce 80th annual meeting on March 14.

The Home has been nominated for the Community Pride Award and the Service Business of the Year Award. The Community Pride award is given to a business, group, or individual whose actions express or grow a sense of pride in the community. The Service Business of the Year award is given to a business that has consistently met a service need in the community and exceeds expectations of quality of service.

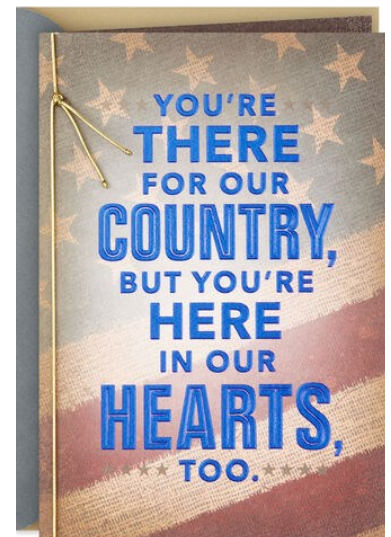
This year the Home celebrated 130 years of great service. It is only fitting that they would be nominated by their community for these two awards.

"We are proud that the Home was nominated for these awards," said Secretary Whitlock. "Our staff at the Home has an outstanding legacy of taking care of our heroes."

Stay tuned and we will update you on the status of the nominations.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SDNG Service Awards .....	2
SDNG Service Awards .....	3
SDNG Service Awards .....	4
SDNG Service Awards .....	5
VA Proposed Budget .....	6
VA Proposed Budget .....	7
MTI Designation .....	7
Upcoming Events .....	8



# SDNG PRESENTS SERVICE AWARDS

The South Dakota National Guard presented seven awards for distinguished service to several Soldiers, families, an employer and a public servant during its 2020 Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Pierre, Feb. 6.

The annual event brings together National Guard members from across the state for a formal evening to honor the organization's history and to recognize individual achievements from the past year.

The awards presented include recognition of outstanding volunteerism by SDNG families, support by a South Dakota employer who employs a service member, lifetime service by a public servant in support of the SDNG mission, and recognition of several Soldiers for acts of heroism.

The event keynote speaker Gov. Kristi Noem and Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general, presented the awards.

3M Aberdeen was awarded the South Dakota Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award. The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one South Dakota employer who provides exceptional support to national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard or Reserve. 3M is a global innovation company working to improve daily life for hundreds of millions of people all over the world. 3M Aberdeen is one of their world-class manufacturing facilities with a mission to be the global site of choice in the safe production of respiratory, filtration, and tape products.

Sgt. Jerrica Loeschke of the SDNG's 740th Transportation Company works as a die-cleaning specialist at 3M Aberdeen. Based on the support that she and her fellow Reserve Component service members receive from 3M Aberdeen, she nominated her employer for the Pro Patria Award.

Those policies include both pay and benefits, such as differential pay for the difference between 3M pay and military pay for up to four 40-hour weeks per year for annual training and up to 18 months for deployments outside of the U.S. Other policies range from supervisor training to hiring preference to service member and family support.

During periods of military service, 3M offers their Guard and Reserve employees, as well as their families, with options to stay connected through a "Soldier Care Checklist," and includes items from information and activities that families might take advantage of such as social gatherings, lawn care or snow removal.

3M's plant leadership also shows their support by attending mobilization and welcome home ceremonies and sending care packages overseas. When employees are deployed, 3M also hangs signs right over the employee entrance so every employee, every day, gets to see this and think about fellow co-workers that are currently deployed. Sgt. Loeschke isn't alone in recognizing 3M Aberdeen's exceptional support either, as 23 supervisors have been nominated for, and received, the Patriot Award by their service member employee, dating back to 2011.



(continued on next page)

# SDNG SERVICE AWARDS (CONTINUED)

The Williamson Militiaman Award recipient is retired Chief Warrant Officer 5 Duke Doering of Rapid City. The Williamson Militiaman Award, established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson, recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-Soldier or Airman as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard and the defense of the country.

Doering served the state and nation for over 44 years in military uniform. Originally enlisting into the South Dakota Army National Guard in 1955, he received an appointment as a warrant officer in 1978 and served in various positions and leadership assignments throughout his career.

Doering's duty assignments in military education, training, marksmanship, force integration, and unit mobilization and readiness provided valuable technical expertise that developed and prepared Soldiers and units for state and federal missions.

Doering was also selected for a prominent leadership role as the first state command chief warrant officer for the SDARNG. He was awarded the Legion of Merit for distinguished service upon his retirement in 1999.

Additionally for the past eight years, Doering served at the SDNG's part-time state historian, completing research and cataloging of the organization's 158-year history and lineage of service. He has published over 500 history articles, sharing countless stories of the SDNG since its origins in 1862.

He has also captured nearly 90 personal interviews with key leaders of the organizations that were influential in the shaping and investment of the National Guard. Due to Doering's work, he has uncovered dozens of untold stories of SDNG service members and units, and he has brought to light their unique story as part of the SDNG history.

The Adjutant General's Family Award recipient was the Muser Family. The award recognizes family members who support their service members in a truly exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices.

Donna and her husband, Master Sgt. Wayne Muser, are the epitome of a healthy and resilient military family. Master Sgt. Muser is a member of the 114th Security Forces Squadron has been in the military for almost 18 years.

During this time, Donna has served by his side supporting the 114th SFS Airmen and has been a key volunteer for the unit over the past three years. She and their six children have been there for Wayne and the SFS during their many deployments, helping and guiding families down the path of resiliency.

Early in 2019, Wayne deployed for six months along with other members from the 114th SFS. During this time, Donna was in constant contact with the other 13 families of the Airmen who had deployed. She kept in constant contact with them and helped families cope with the effects deployment. Donna helped to ensure families felt the support from the 114th Fighter Wing and planned events for the families where they could connect and converse during the stressful time.



(continued on next page)



# SDNG SERVICE AWARDS (CONTINUED)

In addition to helping the military families during Wayne's deployment, Donna continued to homeschool their six children. She also sold their house, bought a new house on a farm and moved their entire family. Their children have also been active in helping 114th SFS families, putting together and sending multiple care packages overseas.

The Muser Family is the pillar of excellence when it comes to their dedication and support of the service members and their families of the South Dakota National Guard.

The South Dakota National Guard recognized the Ellwein Family for being awarded the Association of the United States Army Volunteer Family of the Year Award for 2019.

Ellwein Family members Sgt. Maj. Dianne Ellwein, retired Chief Warrant Officer 4 Fredrick Ellwein, and their children Katlin, Tyler and Austin, were presented the AUSA Volunteer Family of the Year Award for exceptionally meritorious service in direct support of Soldiers and families while serving on active duty for U.S. Army Europe in Wiesbaden, Germany.

Dianne has been a member of the SDNG for nearly the past 40 years, and Fredrick is a retired SDNG member with over 22 years of military service.

While on an active-duty tour for the past four and a half years for U.S. Army Europe, the Ellwein Family spent countless hours giving back to their community and participating in activities that promote the well-being of Soldiers and their families. In 2019 alone, the Ellwein Family amassed almost 4,400 hours of volunteer work in a variety of community, church and civic causes.

The Volunteer Family of the Year Award embodies the spirit of volunteerism and recognizes family members who provide exceptional service to the U.S. Army, its Soldiers and families with impressive contributions in the Wiesbaden military community.

Staff Sgt. David Fischer, Lt. Col. Phillip Stiles and Col. Joseph Jacobson were each presented with the SDNG Medal of Valor for performing individual acts of heroism.

The SDNG Medal for Valor is awarded to any individual who, while a member of the SDNG, distinguishes themselves by heroism - not involving actual conflict with an armed enemy - while in the Armed Forces of the United States and performing normal civilian functions and/or duties.

Staff Sgt. David Fischer is awarded the SDNG Medal for Valor posthumously for exemplary heroic actions while responding to a structure fire in Tilford, South Dakota, on Sept. 7, 2018. Fischer served as a member with the Rapid City-based 82nd Civil Support Team for the SDARNG, and also served as the assistant fire chief with the Sturgis Volunteer Fire Department for 22 years. Fischer perished in the line of duty while responding to the structure fire that threatened both life and property in the Tilford community.



(continued on next page)

# SDNG SERVICE AWARDS (CONTINUED)

Upon arriving on scene, Fischer took immediate action to assess the situation while communicating with the fire station and dispatch personnel. Putting the needs of others before his own, Fischer's quick response, assessment, and prompt request of additional assets to the fire help control a quickly growing fire threatening more lives and property.

Lt. Col. Phillip Stiles is awarded the SDNG Medal for Valor for exemplary heroic actions while saving a drowning swimmer in Cancun, Mexico, on March 13, 2019. Stiles responded to a distressed swimmer in a severe hazard area about 100 meters off the beach at a local resort hotel.

Without regard for his own safety, Stiles quickly grabbed a floatation device and swam through very rough water to rescue the drowning swimmer. Stiles reached the distraught and fatigued swimmer and swam with him back to shore. Stiles' bravery and quick action saved the person's life.

Col. Joe Jacobson is awarded the SDNG Medal for Valor for exemplary heroic actions assisting a man suffering from a life-threatening allergic reaction in Rapid City, South Dakota, on July 9, 2019. A technician performing services at Col. Jacobson's residence was in need of medical assistance after being stung by a yellow jacket.

On their way to the hospital, the man lost consciousness and went into anaphylactic shock. Jacobson immediately called 911 and dispatch routed them to a nearby fire station where first responders were ready to provide medical assistance. Jacobson's instinctive reactions and concern for the safety of others provided quick response during a life-threatening situation.



# VA'S BUDGET REQUEST FOR FY2021

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a proposed \$243.3 billion budget for fiscal year (FY) 2021.

The 10.2% increase from FY 2020 will allow the VA's continued commitment to provide veterans with high quality health care and timely access to benefits and services.

"The budget request will ensure veterans and their families experience health improvements and technological modernization advancements," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "That's evidenced by the increase in budget funds we're receiving — that not only increase health care services and benefits to veterans — but allow the VA to lead the way in forward thinking innovation."

The FY 2021 budget provides robust funding for the secretary's top priorities. It includes \$109.5 billion (an increase of \$13.5 billion or 14.1% above 2020) in discretionary funding and resources for health care, benefits and national cemeteries. Additionally, there's \$133.8 billion (an increase of \$9 billion or 7.2% above 2020) in mandatory funding for benefit programs, specifically: compensation and pensions, readjustment benefits, housing and insurance.

Beginning June 6, 2019, the VA launched its new and improved Veterans Community Care Program giving veterans a choice about how best to meet their health care needs. More than 5,000 veterans per week are accessing the new urgent care benefits provided through the MISSION Act. The FY 2021 request would provide resources to support expansion of the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family to eligible veterans seriously injured in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975.

**Preventing Veteran Suicide:** \$10.2 billion (\$682 million above 2020) for mental health services includes \$313 million for suicide prevention programs, a \$76 million increase (32%) over FY 2020. Part of this funding will support President Trump's Executive Order, President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) program.

**Women's Health:** \$626 million (\$53 million or 9% above FY 2020) for gender-specific women's health care. This increase will expand access to gynecology, provide more primary care services for women and enable VA to continue to identify and serve the health care needs of women Veterans.

**Electronic Health Record Modernization (EHRM):** \$2.6 billion (\$1.2 billion above FY 2020) to continue implementation of a single longitudinal electronic health record (EHR) from active duty to Veteran status and ensure interoperability with the Department of Defense. In addition to funding continued EHR deployment to further sites, the FY 2021 request will accelerate nationwide deployment of the Centralized Scheduling Solution.

**Transforming Business Systems:** \$221 million in the request will support the continued deployment of a modern integrated financial and acquisition management system. The request also includes \$236 million for VA to transform its supply chain system through the implementation of the LogiCole solution (formerly Defense Medical Logistics Standard Support) and other supply chain improvements.

(continued on next page)

# VA FY2021 BUDGET (CONTINUED)

**Blue Water Navy (BWN):** \$137 million to continue implementing the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 (BWN) by ensuring sufficient staff are hired to support claims processing, handle call center activity, and conduct quality reviews. In FY 2021, the VA expects to receive an estimated 70,000 BWN claims and appeals. The VA has received more than 14,000 BWN claims — since Jan. 7 — and has already issued \$7.5 million in retroactive benefit payments to 218 BWN Veterans and survivors.

**VA National Cemeteries:** \$360 million for increased burial access, partnering with stakeholders and preserving Veterans' legacies. In 2019 the National Cemetery Administration achieved the highest customer satisfaction index for any organization in either the public or private sector from the American Customer Satisfaction Index.

**Capital Investments:** \$1.9 billion for VA's total construction program, including funding to complete the American Lake (Tacoma, Washington) and Long Beach (Long Beach, California) projects.

## MTI DESIGNATED MILITARY FRIENDLY SCHOOL AGAIN

Congratulations to the team at Military Technical Institute for being designated again as a "Military Friendly School." More than 1,000 schools participated in the 2020-2021 survey with 695 earning the designation.

The 2020-2021 Military Friendly® Schools list can be found at [www.militaryfriendly.com](http://www.militaryfriendly.com).

Mitchell Technical Institute	Small community college	SD	Military Friendly
------------------------------	-------------------------	----	-------------------

The Military Friendly® Company survey investigates and identifies the organizations whose commitment to serving the military and veteran community is comprehensive in scope and meaningful in terms of actual outcomes and impact. From hiring and career advancement to customer service and charitable investment.

The Military Friendly® Schools survey is the longest-running most comprehensive review of college and university investments in serving military and veteran students. The 2020-2021 Military Friendly® Schools list is more exclusive than ever, and covers institutions offering certificate programs to doctoral degrees.

Military Friendly® is the standard that measures an organization's commitment, effort and success in creating sustainable and meaningful benefit for the military community. The Military Friendly® designation creates better outcomes for veterans. By setting a standard, then promoting it, they provide positive reinforcement for American organizations to invest in programs that improve the lives of veterans. That's good for veterans, good for the organizations and good for America.





# UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 17—State offices closed for President's Day  
Feb 21-23—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center—Oacoma  
Mar 4—VABHHCS Art Show—Fort Meade VA Campus—Building 145 Classroom 109—1:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 6—Drop-In Legal Service for Veterans—DAV Sioux Falls Chapter—1519 W. 51st Street—9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)  
Mar 11—VABHHCS Art Show—Hot Springs VA Campus—Building 1 Rotunda—1:00 pm (MT)  
Mar 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Mar 24—Culvers Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight  
Mar 25—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)  
Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown  
Mar 30—SWO Vietnam Veterans Celebration—Dakota Magic Casino—11:30 am—1:30 pm (CT)  
Apr 26—Midwest Honor Flight Pancake Feed Fundraiser—Forster Community Center—Rock Rapids, IA—10:00 (CT)  
May 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
May 12—8th Annual WWII Veterans Luncheon—TREA Building—Rapid City—11:00 am (MT)  
May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings  
May 21-22—PVA Annual Fishing Tournament—Chamberlain  
May 25—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—MJFSVH Campus—Hot Springs—11:30 am—3:00 pm (MT)  
May 25—State Offices closed for Memorial Day  
May 30—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7  
June 3-7—VFW State Convention—Aberdeen  
Jun 18-21—American legion State Convention—Huron  
Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre  
Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair  
Sep 3-7—SD State Fair  
Sep 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8 (Tentative)  
Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Oct 11—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 (Tentative)  
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer  
South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>  
Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501  
Phone: 605-773-8242  
E-mail address: [audry.ricketts@state.sd.us](mailto:audry.ricketts@state.sd.us)

